

March 12, 2022

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing in **support of**:

- S.B. No. 387: AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.

I am writing **in opposition to** the following bills:

- S.B. No. 365: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS
- S.B. No. 388: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFENSE OF A PERSON OR A PERSON'S DWELLING, PLACE OF WORK OR MOTOR VEHICLE.
- H.B. No. 5418: AN ACT REVISING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATUTES AND INSURANCE STATUTES CONCERNING THEFT OF A MOTOR VEHICLE
- S.B. No. 392: AN ACT CONCERNING STATEMENTS MADE BY JUVENILES.
- H.B. No. 5417: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE AND SERVICES AND FIREARMS BACKGROUND CHECKS.
- S.B. No. 386: AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY LAWS OF THIS STATE.

My name is Jessica Hickey. I am a leader in the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA) and a member of the First Church of Christ Simsbury Core team.

As a teacher and a mother, these issues hit close to home. Whether we are referring to my own biological children, my students who I see as my children, or children I don't know in a neighboring town, I feel that we have a responsibility to do right by our youth. They are all "our children." The bills I oppose are not in the best interest of "our children."

I see how this rise in crime rhetoric and bills relating to juvenile justice will harm our children. Instead I wish Connecticut would invest in community based programs and mental health support that would actually help rather than harm our children. Some of my students would be considered "at risk." Their mental health is suffering, their truancy rates are rising, and they are engaging in various risky behaviors. These students need mental health supports. They need mentoring and community based programs that will help them be successful. These supports are either too expensive or not available to children who are not yet in the criminal justice system, or not living within the city of Hartford.

The Juvenile Justice System in Connecticut has been largely successful. It follows best practices. Legislative changes are made based on facts and data. Legislation derived from the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (which is why I support SB 387) is open to discussion and voting by members including state legislators, prosecutors, public defenders, state agencies, judges, police, state advocates, victim advocates, community-based organizations, adults and youth. Connecticut has been a model in the country on how to successfully and safely reduce the juvenile justice system and expand diversion and services for youth. The legislation I oppose today is a departure from these practices.

The legislation I oppose is an inappropriate reaction to a misinformation campaign about the rise in crime in Connecticut. Claims about these crimes are unfounded and not supported by data. We need to

get at the root causes of crime and invest in issues that will truly make a difference including mental health treatment, affordable housing, public education, job training, and healthcare. We should not to roll back important advances in youth justice through this legislation.

In the bills I oppose today there are detrimental policy proposals that would do harm to our youth and set us back. In some of the proposals, there are some items worth considering, but the helpful pieces of these legislative proposals should come through the Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee.

One of these detrimental proposals aims to increase flexibility when determining whether to detain a child. If this time were extended longer than 6 hours, what would happen during this time? What would be the limit to how long a child could be detained? Children and families should not have to wait for slow systems.

Another proposal that brings up particular concerns is the one which would allow for automatic transfer to regular criminal docket for fourteen year old if charged with certain violent crimes. A fourteen year old cannot currently and should not be tried in the adult system. Children and the development of their brains are fundamentally different from that of adults. They should not be in a system that was designed for adults. Additionally, this would essentially result in rolling back the Raise the Age legislation that was passed in 2015-2016 (which has diverted many kids from the system and has nothing to do with the current climate of youth crime). It's important to know that if they did charge 14 year old as adults they'd be sent to Manson Youth Institute which DOJ released findings in December that found they were in violation of civil and disability rights in terms of their conditions and services for young people. Please give our struggling youth what they need to be successful members of society, do not put them in DOJ facilities that will do even more irreparable harm.

Today, I support SB 387 which comes out of the Juvenile Justice and Oversight Committee. The other proposals which I oppose should be vetted through the Juvenile Justice and Oversight Committee.

These other bills are a reaction from a misinformation campaign. Passing this legislation will undoubtedly lead to an increase in youth (particularly black and brown youth) involvement in the criminal justice system.

Our GHIAA congregations stand ready to defeat policies that are rooted in racist rhetoric and faulty data. To learn more watch this 7 minute video on GHIAA's position: <https://vimeo.com/686784926>

Sincerely,

Jessica Hickey
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